



Task Force D Meeting Summary

Wednesday, October 1, 2008

Task Force D: Enhancing Agricultural Viability convened on Wednesday, October 1, 2008 from 1:30pm-3:30pm in Constitution Hall in Lansing. Council member Dennis West chaired the meeting.

Mr. West called the meeting to order and initiated a brief round of introductions. Kirsten Simmons, executive coordinator of the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC), gave the group an overview of the two duties of each taskforce. Taskforce D will work to implement the recommendations outlined under this taskforce in the MFPC's 2006 Report of Recommendations and will be asked to address emerging food policy issues from time to time. Ms. Simmons also expressed to the group that there is particular interest in state government around urban agriculture and this taskforce will be critical to making the necessary links between rural and urban food systems.

The group was told that the purpose of this meeting was to begin to discuss and develop priorities in implementation of the recommendations to focus our efforts. Ms. Simmons asked the group to let her know if there were additional people that should be invited to the table.

Recommendation D1:

A representative from the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) said that there have been two grant cycles with the Michigan agriculture preservation program.

There are 42,000 temporary easements under PA 112 and 67 permanent. Enrollment and incentive has increased for permanent easements. Information on PA 112 is available through websites and word of mouth, but message seems to be distributed well. There is a tax credit to the land owner through state income tax. The representative from MDA went through the specifics of PA 112, how long it preserves the land, and cost or savings. There are about 450-500 applications for easements each year.

The representative from MDA said there is also the Qualified Land Affidavit which can be used as a preservation tool. There is not a lot of marketing done on this; however, some choose it over PA 112.

The group asked how we move forward on using these preservation tools more often and for a significant amount of time. The sooner there is funding, the better for

Michigan agriculture and natural resources. The commented that they would like to work with MDA to enhance current programs and explore federal funding options.

The taskforce members felt that communities should have ordinances, monitoring plans and master plans that include agriculture preservation as a means of driving the state's economy. Taskforce members said that millages have not been successful in creating agriculture preservation funds. Another taskforce member said it seemed logical to empower local government to tax or pass bond to generate money for this.

Some asked how much we need to worry about agriculture preservation if we are making agriculture viable. The group decided to make it a priority to market what we have and look into additional funding through federal government for agriculture preservation.

Kirsten will meet with Rich and discuss how he could help in identifying direction of this priority.

Recommendation D2:

One taskforce members shared that there is discussion of a possible Select Michigan Green program to identify growing practices associated with a product. This has been done in other states as people have become more interested in knowing how there food is grown.

The MSU Product Center's MarketMaker website had many great partners so far and addresses the policy recommendation from this Food Policy Council taskforce. Michigan is one of at least 20 states committed to MarketMaker. They are looking for more to sign up. An envelope insert was developed to educate people and businesses about this service and will be distributed through Greenstone Farm Credit Services, Farm Bureau, and MSU Extension. They are hoping to pick up more farmers next season. There is a meeting with Wal-Mart to ask for national sponsorship. Funding exists for 3 years from the advertising banners on the site. The service costs about \$15,000/year for web license plus staff expenses.

The taskforce concluded that the Michigan Department of Agriculture, MSU Product Center, and the industry should partner on this program, but may or may not need to be a taskforce priority at this time.

Recommendation D3:

The representative from Travel Michigan said the State of Virginia has there department of environmental quality working on green components of travel sites. They started with basic tourism locations and are now working on ag tourism locations.

The taskforce felt that Michigan can do more to promote ag tourism. Local, authentic, natural, and fresh is a theme that is desired and growing in a big way. A representative

from MDA shared that Right to Agri-Tourism legislation is in process of being developed.

The group wondered if Michigan has set up a one stop shop for resources for agri-tourism entrepreneurs. This is something the group wants to explore.

Several taskforce members asked if there is an opportunity for directional signs for ag tourism as suggested in several state policy reports. Things like ag tourism directories are fantastic and useful, but signs might also be helpful. The group would like to work on more visibility for ag tourism. Kirsten is going to find out if the Michigan Agri-Tourism Association is working with full-time staff or volunteers.

The taskforce also wondered if there were opportunities for more Select Michigan branding at restaurants. A member mentioned that some restaurants already do this and would be great, but more resources would need to be allocated to Select Michigan to achieve.

Travel Michigan has been incorporating food and agriculture into its promotion work. They did two magazine articles on Michigan food and will be doing one on chefs cooking with Michigan food. The Meredith Corporation will promote Michigan wine and restaurants.

Travel Michigan has also been using their Pure Michigan ads to incorporate Michigan agriculture, including Harvest Time and Harbor Country ads/commercials. Pure Michigan ads will go national next summer. They have also sponsored a PBS show about Michigan food.

The group agreed that there is great progress on collaborations with Travel Michigan, but could be room to have agri-tourism as a project.

Recommendation D4:

One of the taskforce members reported that Michigan seems to be in “good shape” as far as Migrant Labor Housing. However, producers are concerned about national immigration policies. Producers have just been scraping by the last few years due to labor shortages.

The group agreed that we should do what we can to attract migrant workers to Michigan with good housing and services.

The taskforce would like to talk with government officials to encourage movement on strong guest worker program and policies that allow for a solution to worker shortages.

The taskforce discussed work with minority farmers and felt we could find a way to support an expansion of what is already happening. MDA and MSU Product Center

have been working with minority farmers. The group felt that supporting the farm workforce should be one priority for the taskforce to sustain agriculture in the future.

Closing/Next Steps

There was no public comment made by the guests in attendance.

Between this meeting and the next meeting of Taskforce D, Ms. Simmons said that she will consolidate the ideas expressed in the meeting and send out a draft of possible priorities for consideration. The goal is to finalize priority areas for Taskforce D as it moves forward with implementation of the recommendations.